

Jack C. Montgomery VAMC Veterans Treatment Court Program Tulsa, Oklahoma





What is Veterans Treatment Court?

Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is a collaboration of numerous agencies including the 14th Judicial District Tulsa County Drug/DUI Court (TCDDC), Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Tulsa County District Attorney's Office, Tulsa County Public Defender's Office, Probation and Court Services Supervision Department, Veteran Volunteer Service Organizations and many other community partners.

Planning meeting

- On July 24, 2008 a meeting of the key stakeholders was convened. In attendance were representatives from the Tulsa County Drug/DUI Court (TCDDC), Tulsa Mayor's Office, and Jack C. Montgomery (JCMVAMC):
 - ✓ Adam Walms, JCMVAMC Facility Director
 - ✓ Dr. Madhu Koduri, Chief, Behavioral Medicine Service
 - ✓ Dr. Steve Jones, Behavioral Medicine Service Supervisor
 - ✓ Dr. Elise Taylor, Substance Use Disorder, Behavioral Medicine Service
 - ✓ Marc Chevalier, Chief, Social Work Service
 - ✓ Rose Ewing, Program Director, Tulsa County Drug/DUI Court
 - ✓ Matt Stiner, Veterans Liaison from the Office of the Tulsa Mayor
 - ✓ Doris Gruntmeir, JCMVAMC legal counsel

Visit to Buffalo, NY VTC

- In October of 2008, the Planning committee met with the Veterans treatment court program in Buffalo, NY to learn about the Buffalo Veterans Court Diversion Project.
- During that visit, the team held meetings, observed a Veterans court docket, learned about the roles of the mentors, service officers, and VARO representatives.
- The team met with VA staff, toured the facility, and heard a success story from one participant of the Buffalo Veterans Court.

First VTC Court hearing

- The first Tulsa VTC Court docket was convened on December 8, 2008. At the time of inception, the Tulsa VTC was the third in the nation to have a dedicated docket for Veterans, which operates as a unique subset of the existing TCDDC program, and the first VTC with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Objectives:

- To connect eligible Veterans with substance use disorder treatment, benefits coordination and support services available through the VA
- To assign Veterans to service officers who will provide assistance on ratings and pension issues.
- To avoid incarceration.
- To provide excellent healthcare to Veterans

Objectives cont.

- To decrease recidivism rates
- To conduct outreach to Veterans so that they may develop skills to live a productive and sober life.
- To help Veterans obtain housing, reach educational goals and gain employment.

VTC Court and VA SUD Treatment Meetings Schedule

- Monday: VTC Court Docket
- Tuesday: Initial Appearance Docket
- Wednesday: Plea Docket for VTC
- Thursday: VA SUD/VTC Program Treatment Team Meeting
- Friday: VTC Staffing

Eligibility criteria

- Veterans charged with alcohol or drug-related misdemeanors and felonies:
 - DUI
 - Unlawful Possession of Controlled Drug with Intent to Distribute
 - Unlawful Possession of drug paraphernalia
 - Domestic Violence charges

Referral process

- The DA makes the final decision for any participant who wishes to plea into Drug Court/VTC.
- If the Veteran is allowed and elects to plea into VTC, the Judge will order an assessment the following week.
- Once the assessment is complete the Veteran will have the opportunity to plea into VTC during the Drug Court Orientation docket held on Wednesday's at 12:00 p.m. (usually one week later following the Initial appearance docket).

Referral procedure cont.

- Veterans are referred to the VA SUD/VTC program (if VA benefits eligible) for an intake.
- Those not eligible for VA benefits are referred to a community based SUD treatment provider.

Tulsa County Drug/DUI Court Program (TCDDC)

The Tulsa County Drug/DUI Court Program Staffing Plan includes:

- VTC Judge
- Program Director and VTC Coordinator
- VTC Assistant Coordinator
- Supervision Officer–Human Skills and Resources Inc.
- Vocational/Educational Coordinator
- Court Services Officer
- Treatment providers

TCDDC Roles

- TCDDC Program Director/VTC Coordinator: During the docket hearing, Veterans meet with the Coordinator, turn in meeting sheets, and discuss progress. Concerns are addressed at that time. The Coordinator is responsible for assignment of treatment providers . She is responsible for the administration of the program.
- VTC Assistant Coordinator: Receives client status reports, prepares staffing reports for Friday staff meetings, assists with medication requests, receives and reports UDS results, and coordinates VTC orientation. Back up for Coordinator.

TCDDDC Roles cont.

- VTC Supervision Officer : Conducts home visits, curfew checks, and assists with legal issues related to supervision requirements. Verifies employment status and assists with transportation as needed. This is a contracted position.
- Vocational/Education Coordinator: Assists with job search, interviewing skills, and resume writing. Conducts career assessments and planning. Monitors progress with educational plan such as GED, diplomas, class attendance, and job leads. Conducts weekly Voc-Education groups.

TCDDC Roles cont.

- Court Services Officer: Coordinates testing at court services. Issues SCRAM, Sobriator, and GPS monitoring devices. Reports results of UDS during staffing (positives, dilutes, misses, questions).

Urine Drug Screens

- Veterans are assigned a color when they enter VTC. Color is associated with Phase level. They are required to call the “color line” daily to find out if their color is drawn. If drawn, they are required to provide a urine drug screen that day.
- Veterans who miss a urine drug screen, have dilutes, or test positive for substance use often receive a sanction of “rainbow.” Rainbow is a higher frequency of urine drug testing.

Urine Drug Screens cont.

- Veterans are required to pay for their own testing unless they apply for a Pauper's Affidavit due to lack of income.
- Court will pay for cost of testing temporarily, but the Veteran is still financially obligated to find a way to pay for testing.
- Veterans can also receive a voucher for testing but are expected to pay back the voucher before completing VTC.

SUD/VTC Program Staffing Plan

➤ Tulsa

1.0 SUD/VTC Program Manager and Psychologist

1.0 VTC Liaison

1.0 SUD/PTSD Psychologist (split between Muskogee and Tulsa)

1.0 Social worker

3.0 Addiction Therapist

1.0 PA

SUD/VTC Program Staffing Plan continued -

➤ Muskogee

- 1 .0 Psychologist/team leader
- 2.0 Social workers
- 1.0 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist**
- 1.5 Psychiatrist
- 1.0 Nurse
- 1.0 Addiction Therapist
- .5 Program Support

VTEL Services – Hartshorne and Vinita

JCMVAMC SUD/VTC Program

- The JCMVAMC SUD program offers services at four sites: the Muskogee hospital, Tulsa Behavioral Medicine Service CBOC, Hartshorne CBOC (Vtel), and Vinita CBOC (Vtel)
- The JCMVAMC SUD program provides all levels of care: outpatient detox, individual outpatient/aftercare, intensive outpatient treatment, detoxification/residential treatment, and dual d/o treatment.

Evidence-based Treatment

- Matrix Model Institute
- Motivational Interviewing
- Seeking Safety
- Relapse Prevention/Harm Reduction
- 12-step support groups (AA, NA, DRA, Celebrate Recovery, SOS)
- Brief Interventions for Hazardous Drinking

Other resources

- SUD/VTC program contracts with a community agency for higher levels of care (detox/residential treatment and lodging for IOP).
- SUD/PTSD Psychologist and SUD Homeless SUD Specialist
- Other resources provided within Behavioral Medicine Service include PTSD/MST services, mental health, psychiatric care, housing programs, work programs, psychological testing, case management, and other ancillary services.

VTC Liaison Role-Devan Brotherton

- ✓ Assists with eligibility and enrollment
- ✓ Attends staffing sessions and court appearances
- ✓ Provides linkage and case management
- ✓ Case consultation and aftercare planning
- ✓ Crisis intervention
- ✓ Provides treatment status reports to the TCDDC on a weekly basis
- ✓ Assists with treatment planning and placement for Veterans

VTC Liaison Role - continued

- Helps Veterans navigate through the various systems and agencies
- Conducts outreach
- Links Veteran's to financial assistance through various resources
- Finds housing and transportation
- Helps Veterans meet basic needs
- Advocacy
- Miracle Worker

Veterans Justice Outreach

Specialist role – Paula Willcox

- Attendance at Creek County Veterans Court , Tulsa County Municipal Court, Tulsa Drug Court Pre-trial, Muskogee County Drug Court
- Completes HOMES assessments on all Veterans
- Meets with Veterans in custody

Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist Role - continued

- Provides linkage and referral to other services (medical, SUD/mental health, legal, benefits)
- Outreach to Tribal courts and other key community stakeholders.

Roles of Regional Office and Veterans Volunteer Service Organizations

- The Regional Office Director was a key stakeholder in the VTC and included in the Memorandum of Understanding.
- As a result, a VARO representative is present in VTC Court to provide immediate answers to questions regarding benefits eligibility, status of service-connected claims that are pending, ratings, etc.

Service Officers component

- Tulsa Veterans Court Service Officers are involved from the following Volunteer Service Organizations:
- ✓ Disabled American Veterans
- ✓ Veterans of Foreign Wars
- ✓ American Legion

Mentor component

- The mentor component is in the process of being implemented, but Service Officers have informally served in this role and are having positive influence on the Veteran participants.
- Important qualities in mentor:
 - Match by branch of military, campaign or era, gender, and age, if possible
 - Choose mentors who have some experience in recovery or are sober role models

VTC Phases

• Phase	Duration	Sanction Free	Appointments	Appearance
• Phase 1	4 weeks	2 weeks	Weekly	Weekly
• Phase 2	8 weeks	4 weeks	Weekly	2 weeks
• Phase 3	20 weeks	8 weeks	Bi-Weekly	3 weeks
• Phase 4	16 weeks	12 weeks	3 weeks	1/month
• Phase 5	24 weeks	Clean 180 days	Therapist discretion	1/month

Outcome Data Since Inception

- Successful Completions = 67 (83%)
- Veterans enrolled in college or furthered education = 6 (1 received bachelor; 4 received professional degrees)
- Employment = 42 employed; 13 disabled; 3 retired; 8 students; 1 military service

Outcome Data continued

- Veterans with increased income = 36 (average increase of \$1380)
- Average number of sanctions = 5.3 (lower than other specialty courts)

Outcome Data - continued

- 63% of veterans were employed at graduation
- 100% of veterans had a high school diploma or higher at graduation
- 9% of veterans were enrolled in higher education at graduation

Achievements

- ❖ 2010 – VTC program was selected as one of four National Mentor Veterans Courts by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.
- ❖ Currently in the process of re-evaluating for National Mentor Veterans Court status for the next three years.

Achievements

- ❖ 2009 – Dr. Taylor, SUD/VTC Program Manager; Dowanna Wright, VTC Liaison; and Judge Sara Smith received leadership awards for their roles in the development of the VTC from the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa.

Achievements

- ❖ 2009 – VTC Program presentation at the VISN 16 Substance Use Disorder Conference in Houston, Texas
- ❖ 2009 – 2010 Panel participation for VISN 16 Veterans Justice Outreach Conference in Austin, Texas and for VISN 16 panel at the VA Mental Health Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

Achievements

- ❖ The VTC has provided mentor training to several VA and community providers:
 - ✓ Kansas City, Missouri
 - ✓ Harris County, Texas
 - ✓ Cherokee Nation, Arkansas Governor's Office, and a representative from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
 - ✓ Tarrant County, Texas
 - ✓ Little Rock, Arkansas

Achievements

❖ Publications with written articles on the VTC program:

- VA Vanguard; MIRREC Newsletter; Los Angeles Times;
- Washington Post; US Mayor; United States
- Conference of Mayors Magazine; The Journal Record;
- Alcoholism Drug Abuse Weekly; Tulsa People
- Magazine; Oklahoma Magazine ; and the Tulsa World

Lessons learned

- ❖ Develop MOU in advance
- ❖ Have VARO representative in the court room – Get Buy-In from VARO early in planning stage.
- ❖ Start out with small caseload and gradually increase numbers as experience is gained and “kinks” are worked out
- ❖ Be flexible

Lessons Learned cont.

- ❖ Create ability to communicate electronically using encrypted e-mail or other web-based data sharing to expedite treatment documents to the court.
- ❖ No wrong door policy for referrals
- ❖ Improved relationship and communication between Tulsa County VTC, VARO and Volunteer Service Organizations
- ❖ Establish strong linkages to community partners and resource sharing.



Questions & Answers